

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel Claims 4, 5, 8 and 9 without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter. Please amend Claims 1, 10, 12, 14, 18, 20 and 22 as follows. The claims, as pending in the subject application, read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) An image input apparatus comprising:  
~~conversion means for converting an image signal into digital information;~~  
reading means for reading an encryption key stored in ~~from~~ an external  
source;  
~~first storage means for storing said encryption key read by the reading~~  
means;  
~~second storage means for storing said encryption key to execute an~~  
encryption process;  
encryption means for encrypting ~~the~~ digital information by using said  
encryption key stored in the ~~second~~ storage means; and  
output means for outputting the encrypted digital information after  
completion of the encryption by said encryption means; and  
erasing means for erasing said encryption key stored in ~~from~~ said ~~first and~~  
~~second~~ storage means corresponding to the outputting of the encrypted digital information  
~~coincident with completion of the digital information being encrypted by the encryption~~  
means.

2. (Original) An image input apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said encryption means encrypts the digital information which has undergone a high-efficiency coding operation.

3. (Original) An image input apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising image pick-up means for optically picking up an image of a subject and for generating an image signal from the picked-up image.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Original) An image input apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said encryption key comprises an encryption key based on a common key cryptosystem.

7. (Original) An image input apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said encryption key comprises an encryption key based on a public key cryptosystem.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Canceled)

10. (Currently Amended) An image input method comprising the steps of:  
~~converting an image signal into digital information;~~  
~~reading an encryption key stored in form an external source;~~  
~~a first storage step of storing said encryption key in a first storage means;~~  
~~a second storage step of storing said encryption key in a second storage~~  
~~means to execute an encryption process;~~  
~~encrypting the digital information by using said encryption key stored in~~  
~~said second storage means; and~~  
~~outputting the encrypted digital information after completion of the~~  
~~encryption in said encrypting step, and~~  
~~erasing said encryption key stored in from said first and second storage~~  
~~means corresponding to the outputting of the encrypted digital information coincident with~~  
~~completion of the digital information being encrypted in the encrypting step.~~

11. (Original) An image input method according to claim 10, wherein the digital information which has undergone a high-efficiency coding operation is encrypted.

12. (Currently Amended) An image input method according to claim 10, wherein the an image signal is generated from an optically picked up image of a subject which is converted into the digital information.

13. (Original) An image input method according to claim 10, wherein said encryption key comprises an encryption key based on one of a common key cryptosystem and a public key cryptosystem.

14. (Currently Amended) An encryption processing program stored in a computer-readable medium, comprising:

~~a step of converting an image signal into digital information;~~

~~a step of reading an encryption key stored in from an external source;~~

~~a first storage step of storing said encryption key in a first storage means;~~

~~a second storage step of storing said encryption key in a second storage means to execute an encryption process;~~

~~a step of encrypting the digital information by using said encryption key stored in said second storage means; and~~

~~a step of outputting the encrypted digital information after completion of the encryption in said encrypting step; and~~

~~a step of erasing said encryption key stored in from said first and said second storage means corresponding to the outputting of the encrypted digital information coincident with completion of the digital information being encrypted in the encrypting step.~~

18. (Currently Amended) An image input apparatus comprising:

~~conversion means for converting an image signal into digital information;~~

information encryption means for encrypting the digital information by using an internal encryption key ~~stored within said image input apparatus;~~

obtaining means for obtaining an external encryption key stored in an external source;

storage means for storing said ~~inputting from an external source an external encryption key to execute a key for encrypting said internal encryption key process;~~

key encryption means for encrypting said internal encryption key by using said external encryption key stored in said storage means ~~and storing said external encryption key in a plurality of storage means; and~~

output means for outputting the encrypted digital information and the encrypted internal encryption key after completion of the key encryption by said key encryption means; and

erasing means for erasing ~~both the external internal encryption key stored in the image input apparatus and the external encryption key stored in said plurality of storage means~~ corresponding to the outputting of the encrypted digital information and the encrypted internal encryption key ~~coincident with completion of encrypting the internal encryption key by the key encryption means.~~

19. (Original) An image input apparatus according to claim 18, wherein said internal encryption key comprises an encryption key based on a common key cryptosystem, and said external encryption key comprises an encryption key based on a public key cryptosystem.

20. (Currently Amended) An image input method for an image input apparatus comprising the steps of:

~~converting an image signal into digital information;~~

~~encrypting the digital information by using an internal encryption key stored within said image input apparatus;~~

~~obtaining from an external source an external encryption key stored in an external source for encrypting said internal encryption key;~~

~~storing said external encryption key in a storage means to execute a key encryption process;~~

~~key encrypting said internal encryption key by using said external encryption key stored in said storage means and storing said external encryption key in a plurality of storage means; and~~

~~outputting the encrypted digital information and the encrypted internal encryption key after completion of the key encryption by in said key encryption step; and~~

~~erasing both the internal encryption key stored in the image input apparatus and the external encryption key stored in said plurality of storage means corresponding to the outputting of the encrypted digital information and the encrypted internal encryption key coincident with completion of the step of encrypting the internal encryption key using the external encryption key.~~

22. (Currently Amended) An encryption processing program stored in a computer-readable medium, comprising:

~~a step of converting an image signal into digital information;~~

~~a step of encrypting the digital information by using an internal encryption key stored within an image input apparatus;~~

~~a step of obtaining from an external source an external encryption key stored in an external source for encrypting said internal encryption key;~~

~~a step of storing said external encryption key in a storage means to execute a key encryption process;~~

~~a step of key encrypting said internal encryption key by using said external encryption key stored in said storage means and storing said external encryption key in a plurality of storage means; and~~

~~a step of outputting the encrypted digital information and the encrypted internal encryption key after completion of the key encryption in said key encrypting step;~~  
~~and~~

~~a step of erasing both the internal encryption key stored in the image input apparatus and the external encryption key stored in said plurality of storage means corresponding to the outputting of the encrypted digital information and the encrypted internal encryption key coincident with completion of the step of encrypting the internal encryption key.~~